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SENSITIVE

STATE PASS TO DEPT OF INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, ATTN: STEVE MORRIS AND JONATHAN PUTNAM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNESCO](#)

SUBJECT: FEBRUARY 2009 FUTURE OF WORLD HERITAGE EXPERTS MEETING

¶1. (SBU) Summary and comment: A disconnect between theory and reality marked the February 2009 experts meeting on the World Heritage Convention's future. With the WH List continuing to grow at a rapid rate, resources static, and the conservation of WH sites, and the Convention's prime purpose, almost treated as an afterthought by some, there was a lack of focus that could threaten the future of the Convention. The Spanish chairperson's attempt to identify and prioritize the problems was less than stellar, and suggests that she will be hard-pressed to propose recommendations and drive the WH Committee to reach any clear solutions during its meeting in Seville this June. End Summary and comment.

¶2. (U) Three meetings were held at UNESCO headquarters (24-27 February) in an attempt to prepare the ground for the upcoming World Heritage (WH) Committee meeting in Seville, June 22-30, 2009. Half-day meetings were held regarding the use of the WH Emblem, and another on the WH budget. (See septels). The main meeting of the week was a two and a half-day gathering on the Future of the WH Convention, bringing together WH experts from many of the States Parties. The U.S. was represented by Steve Morris and Jonathan Putnam from the National Park Service at the Department of the Interior. David Ostroff accompanied them from the U.S. Mission staff.

The Future of World Heritage

¶3. (U) The key meeting of the week focused on the future of the WH Convention, and was designed to identify and prioritize issues to set the stage for further debate and decisions in Seville. WH Center Director Bandarin opened the discussions by noting that 44 countries out of the 186 signatories had submitted comments in response to the Secretariat's request for input. It was not clear how many countries had experts present at the meeting, though it was well attended. The comments served as the framework for an extended debate, with the experts present splitting into three separate discussion groups, each covering the same topic at the same time: A) Values, messages and image of the Convention; B) Conservation and Sustainable Development; and C) The World Heritage System. Rapporteurs from each discussion group gave a summary of the debates, which served as a launch pad for further discussion. Despite efforts to keep the discussions on theme, the experts felt no compunction to limit their comments, leaving the moderators perplexed and adding to the overall sense of "nothing is ever going to get decided" during the meeting. No final declaration was proposed, but WH Committee Chair, Spanish Ambassador Maria San Segundo, announced that a summary would be prepared by the rapporteurs, Chairman, and Secretariat staff for presentation to the WH Committee in Seville.

Spain launches Prehistory as a new WH Theme

¶4. (U) Ambassador San Segundo took the opportunity to introduce plans for a new theme on "WH and Prehistory" that would run throughout the year of Spain's chairmanship, adding that Spain would be sponsoring four meetings on the subject in 2009: One on

prehistory in general; one on human evolution; one on rock art; and one regarding prehistoric WH sites. San Segundo noted that the theme has strong links to Science, and would bolster the participation of Caribbean, African, and the Pacific States Parties, as they all have strong links to prehistory in relation to WH sites.

She also took the opportunity to remind participants about the creation of new regional centers for WH that will be opened in the Nordic countries, China and Bahrain, all of which will center on capacity building and conservation.

Back to Basics or the Risk of Implosion

15. (U) Former Chair of the WH Committee (for the 2008 meetings in Quebec), Dr. Christina Cameron, launched the debate on the Future of the WH Convention with a short speech, reminding the States Parties that the original signers of the Convention would never have imagined the size and complexity we face today with a WH List of 878 sites and growing. She warned that the Convention risks imploding under the weight of its own success. Cameron told the assembly that the credibility of the Convention is endangered by its search for "representivity." She reminded the gathering that the original concept was to create a "select list" of the most outstanding sites in the world, not one that is geographically balanced. She also warned against the List veering increasingly towards negativity (politicization) and nationalism. (Comment: Later in the meeting, comments on the growing politicization were much sharper, with several experts noting that what had been subtle lobbying in the past has now become harassment and unbearable pressure. End comment). She noted that the Danger List is not being used as originally intended, and that it has become perceived as a "black mark", rather than as a rallying point to help countries having serious problems maintaining their sites.

Shocking Time Management - 12 Minutes per Site

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16. (U) Cameron went on to complain that the time management problem the WH Committee faces each year is a disaster in the making. Noting that in Quebec, the Committee was obliged to make an average of five decisions per hour, Cameron said that given the years devoted to the preparation of each dossier, the twelve minutes given to examine each nomination was not credible, and not sustainable. (Comment: Chairman San Segundo's inability to manage time during the three meetings was egregious, and guarantees that Seville will suffer the same or worse fate in terms of dealing with substantive decisions in unacceptably short blocks of time. End comment).

Debates - New Ideas Surfacing

17. (U) While much of the two and half day discussion on the future of the WH Convention was connected to recurring themes, including budget, the over-worked Secretariat, "representivity" and improved efficiency, other ideas surfaced that were worth noting, and will be interesting to follow should they gain traction in the coming months.

Adding a Second WH Committee Meeting per Year

18. (U) Several experts suggested that a second meeting of the WH Committee be held in Paris each year, providing a means to ease the pressure caused by the heavy agenda at the annual WH Committee meeting. Different ideas were floated about how the work could be split up to improve time management and potentially slow the number of inscriptions. They included restricting discussions on inscriptions to every second year, which would permit more time to focus on the problem of conservation during the year in which nominations are not considered. Others suggested that inscriptions

and management issues be separated out into two different meetings, as well. (Note: see para 12 below: "Division of Work"). Chairman San Segundo is a strong advocate of holding a second meeting per year, but Secretariat personnel are concerned that organizing a second meeting per year will severely cut into their ability to do their "real work." The question of the cost of a second meeting was not broached, but must be considered before any recommendations are made to the WH General Assembly.

Inscriptions - A Finite or Infinite List?

¶9. (U) Despite clear warnings from Christina Cameron and others about placing more strain on the system, some experts, with Kenya being particularly vocal, insisted that more sites need to be added to the List. (Note: Bandarin has been quoted as saying that new inscriptions are the life-blood of the Convention). When some experts raised the idea of a moratorium or capping the List, others, notably from Africa and Brazil objected strenuously. During the discussion, the idea of a moratorium seemed to be more of a straw man to be knocked down, rather than a serious proposal. The U.S. strongly backed the idea that we need to concentrate more on conservation, and reiterated the option of self-imposed limits, noting the U.S. as an example of self-restraint in making nominations. India, for example, suggested the solution is to increase resources to handle the increased volume. As the question of adding to the List was raised, Brazil and others took the opportunity to again point out existing problems regarding geographic balance and proportionality being handled by former Japanese Ambassador Seichi Kondo's Working Group on procedures for election to the World Heritage Committee, which is due to report to the Seville meeting, as well. Others expressed the idea that some countries were unable to nominate sites due to their lack of expertise, to which Brazil announced that it would assist States Parties, both financially and in terms of technical expertise, to present credible dossiers for nominations. There was no consensus on the idea of capping the List, with many States Parties clearly supportive of continuing to add to it, providing what they see as greater "balance" to the List. Brazil commented that we are not building a Convention for the "short-term", but rather we are constructing a List that could "go on for centuries," adding that "we cannot have a list that is based on the past."

U.S. Help in Capacity Building?

¶10. (U) In an effort to brainstorm on ways the U.S. might assist in capacity building, U.S. expert, Steve Morris, mentioned privately to other U.S. delegation members that his office is in the first phase of reflection on a possible initiative to assist States Parties that lack sufficient management expertise to run their own WH Sites. Morris is considering a "World Heritage Scholarship" program where visiting WH administrators or staff would be trained at U.S. National Park/WH Sites for periods up to 6 months.

Cooperation Among UNESCO Conventions

¶11. (U) One subject that came up frequently was the idea, promoted by both Chairman San Segundo and ADG Culture Riviere, that there

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must be a greater level of cooperation among the seven "culture" Conventions under UNESCO's responsibility. Norway, for example, lamented that the WH Convention "lives in splendid isolation", and urged a "holistic review" of the Conventions which will strengthen them all. Another expert suggested that reducing "compartmentalism" between instruments would allow greater complementarity, e.g., between natural sites and biodiversity issues. Others suggested that better coordination would avoid any duplication of effort among Conventions.

Division of Work

¶12. (U) Another issue that was raised by several experts regarded the division of labor between the WH Committee and the WH General Assembly. While the workload of the WH Committee continues to increase, many complained that the WH General Assembly does nothing more than elect the WH Committee membership. It was suggested that many issues that are clearly of a more substantive nature should be dealt with by the WH General Assembly, leaving the decisions of a more technical nature to the WH Committee. Norway, in particular, noted that the WH Committee has become "a political battleground, not the sober and professional body it should be." The idea of reinstituting a WH Bureau to take on decision making was quickly shot down, as former WH Chair Vera Lacoecilhe (Saint Lucia) reminded experts that it had been tried and failed. Another point raised regarding division of labor was the current imbalance between the Secretariat and the Advisory Bodies, with a suggestion that the Advisory Bodies be given even more work, freeing up the Secretariat to better manage the Convention as a whole.

Definition of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)

¶13. (U) There was renewed debate about not having clearly defined the concept of OUV in the WH Convention. In the same vein as the Supreme Court Justice who, when asked to define pornography said, "I know it when I see it..." the simple and powerful concept of OUV is an evolving and dynamic process, mirroring shifts and changing values in time. In the context of conservation, the definition of OUV is key to understanding why a particular property is worthy of our care and attention. In the various debates regarding conservation, it was expressed that while OUV may be linked to ideas, ultimately OUV is linked to each property. The U.S. expert described the "statement of OUV" as part of the contract between the State Party and the WH Committee about how the site will be maintained. It was, therefore, suggested that a statement of OUV be assigned for every site, helping guide future decisions about conservation, providing a better understanding of what values drove the WH Committee, at a particular point in time, to inscribe the site on the List.

Selling the WH Brand

¶14. (U) A short, but interesting intervention during the meeting came from Mr. Tim Heberden from the Australian firm, Brand Finance, specializing in "brand economics". His comments on the World Heritage "brand" were surprising, with Heberden saying that he doesn't understand why the clear partnership between the multi-billion dollar tourism industry and the WH Center aren't better exploited. He said that he would give the World Heritage "brand name" recognition an indicative "BBB" (or average) rating, and believes that the "brand value" for World Heritage, if properly managed, could be in the neighborhood of \$500 million.

¶15. (U) Despite the mediocre rating given by Mr. Heberden, some experts held to their arguments that devaluation of the brand is not possible, no matter how many sites are ultimately put on the list. Brazil, saying "gold is gold, no matter how much you have", was notably out of synch with the branding expert on this point.

Fly-Over Tourist Dollars

¶16. (U) Another subject that came up frequently was the problem of tourists visiting WH Sites, paying for their trips in their home country, and leaving little or no "trickle-down" money in the country where the site is located. Some solutions suggested special taxes earmarked for conservation of WH sites, compulsory surcharges, or voluntary contributions at the time of payment. Several experts suggested that these taxes and surcharges be levied on tour operators, while others felt that individuals might be more charitable, given that the monies would be used to help improve conservation of WH Sites.

WH Convention to Alleviate Poverty?

¶17. (SBU) One subject that came up several times during the meeting was that the WH Convention somehow has a role to play in alleviating poverty in the developing world. This was mentioned notably by a

representative from the African WH Fund, who spoke of "squalor and poverty" in or near WH Sites in Africa. Linking conservation,

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tourism and sustainable development together provided some experts with a sturdy enough soap-box to climb up on and urge the gathering to look at ways for the WH Convention to benefit local communities. Kenya, referring to the U.S., accused us of "purist thinking" regarding the Convention, adding that conservation without people is wrong. ICOMOS's president, Mr. Araoz, notably suggested that the WH Convention develop a "major role" in community building. (Comment: Crossing the finely drawn lines between WH Committee issues and questions of national sovereignty could be very problematic if this highly political subject is not approached with caution. End Comment.

Far from Conclusions

¶18. (U) WH Center Secretary Bandarin proposed that a global survey be undertaken to determine how the public sees the World Heritage Convention as it reaches its fortieth anniversary, and to help define what function it can have in the future. On the subject of sustainable development, Bandarin said that the Secretariat will work on some ideas regarding "best practices" to recommend to the WH Committee. ADG Riviere mentioned the idea of having a short list of "WH Centers of Excellence" which would provide clear examples of OUV and best practices for conservation. She said that the WH Center should become, in this regard, a center for knowledge management. (Note: Brazil, in particular, commented on the fact that the Secretariat is increasingly taking on responsibilities beyond its mandate).

¶19. (U) The other key point that surfaced during the meetings was the increased need to focus on the problems of conservation and capacity building, with several experts suggesting that we need to be more pro-active and less reactive on these points. The U.S. clearly stated that the Convention is about conservation, and that we must be cautious about discussing development issues, adding that for many sites, (including natural sites), no development would be appropriate. Riviere mentioned the idea of creating "autonomous" centers for WH training, (like Category II centers), to build on cooperation and partnership. Brazil announced, without adding any details, that it plans a regional center in Rio for WH Management. Overall, most experts seemed to agree on the fact that any structural solutions to improving the workload problems will fall on the Secretariat, and will require greater resources, while acknowledging that the system, as it exists today, is under great stress. The U.S. made the point that the World Heritage Centre's role as a Secretariat seems to be taking a back seat to its technical assistance work and its efforts to convene expert meetings on various themes, activities that might be better carried out by the Advisory Bodies, if they were appropriately funded.

¶20. U.S. World Heritage Nominations

In side conversations with staff from the World Heritage Centre, the U.S. representatives were informed that both of the two U.S. World Heritage nomination dossiers submitted in January 2009 (Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and Mount Vernon) were certified by the Centre as being "complete," meaning that they will now be forwarded to the Advisory Bodies for evaluation. They will be considered for inscription at the 2010 Committee session.

¶21. (SBU) Comment: While Chairman San Segundo announced her overall goal at the start of the meeting was to prioritize issues for consideration, it is clear that the gathering failed to even identify all of the problems facing the WH Convention at this crucial point in time. How she will shape the discussions, with the

help of the rapporteurs and facilitators, remains to be seen, but will surely not satisfy certain experts should their particular concerns not be highlighted. End Comment. ENGELKEN